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SPECIFIC GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS: OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

Written statement*/ submitted by Inclusion International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 January 2001]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Inclusion International, which represents some 200 associations in 115 countries, acts as watchdog for the protection of the human rights of 60 million persons with intellectual disabilities and the hundreds of millions of family members who share their lives, to be found in every nation throughout the world.

Inclusion International is one of the largest grass-roots networks of families, friends, self-advocates and professionals, all devoted to combating discrimination, abuse and neglect of these people.

For 40 years this non-governmental organization has developed initiatives in order to reach its goals :
- Inclusion of people with intellectual disability in all aspects of society;
- Full citizenship which respects individual rights and responsibilities;
- Self-determination in order to have control over the decisions affecting one's life;
- Family support through adapted services and self-help networks.

In past years, significant progress has been made in improving the living conditions of people with disabilities:

- Since they were introduced in 1993, the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities have played a major role in making disability issues more visible;

- A number of governments have introduced legislation and policies based on the Standard Rules, and others are on the eve of formalizing policies in order to create sustainable change.

The special condition of people with intellectual disabilities is slowly being acknowledged. This Commission in particular has emphasized the need to respect the human rights of persons with developmental and psychiatric disabilities in Resolutions 1998/31 and 2000/51.

Thus Inclusion International is fully aware of the advances made. Nevertheless, such signs of progress must not only be pursued and developed, but actively defended.

- Almost a decade has passed since the link between disability and human rights was clearly outlined by the Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission , Mr. Leandro Despouy, in his study. But little has come of his work despite the concrete recommendations for action expressed in paragraphs 271-284.

- In practice, people with disabilities continue to be marginalized. People with intellectual disability, in particular, are the most likely of all to be incarcerated in inhumane institutions. They are commonly deprived of an education, refused ordinary social relationships, blocked from meaningful and gainful employment, reduced to irrevocable poverty... their civil and political rights are frequently abused, as are their physical persons.

These problems are not limited to developing countries. They may be found in every nation of the world, and have been acknowledged by Mrs Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

- Disability issues are losing visibility. NGOs observe with dismay a growing tendency in international reports to refer to people with disabilities within the poorly defined framework of "other vulnerable groups and individuals," as if they were splinter groups (whereas they represent a significant proportion of the world's population.
  Despite the obvious and laudable wish to avoid stigmatization, such a broad and vague category puts the rights and needs of people with disabilities at the back of peoples' minds. They appear little more than an afterthought.
  People with intellectual disabilities are especially at risk since, unnamed, they and their families tend to be totally forgotten.

United Nations human rights organs have failed to agree on an international treaty to promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities, despite the fact that specific and relevant treaties already exist for other vulnerable groups such as women, children, migrant workers, minorities and refugees, all of whom have legitimacy as specific items on this Commission's agenda.

Inclusion International encourages the appointment by this Commission of a human rights expert with knowledge of disability, to conduct the examination of measures to strengthen the protection and monitoring of human rights of persons with disabilities.

However, Inclusion International would like to suggest that it might be appropriate for the Commission to acknowledge the existence of people with disabilities as a specific group and the need for greater respect of their Human rights, by introducing their cause as a permanent and explicit item of constant concern and attention on the agenda.